



COMMITTEE FOR ACCURACY IN MIDDLE EAST REPORTING I

THE NY TIMES “EXPLAINS” JERUSALEM – AND ITS MISTAKES EXPLAIN MUCH

BY: ALEX SAFIAN, PHD / DECEMBER 9, 2017



After US President Donald Trump decided to [recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital](#), the *New York Times* decided to explain to its readers just what the Jerusalem issue is all about. Unfortunately [The Jerusalem Issue, Explained](#) by Max Fisher exposed once again the *Times*' own bias and ignorance when it comes to Israel.

Fisher gets it wrong right from the start:

Both Israelis and Palestinians claim the city as their political capital and as a sacred religious site. Israel controls the entirety of the city. Any peace deal would need to resolve that.

The city's status has been disputed, at least officially, since the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. Before that, the United Nations had designated Jerusalem as a

special international zone. During the war, Israel seized the city's western half. It seized the eastern half during the next Arab-Israeli war, in 1967.

Did the United Nations designate Jerusalem as "a special international zone." No it did not. Instead the United Nations General Assembly passed in 1947 UNGA Res. 181, the so-called "partition resolution," which called for the creation of a Jewish and an Arab state out of the territory of the British-run Palestine Mandate. According to that resolution Jerusalem and its environs would be a "corpus separatum" under UN trusteeship for up to 10 years, after which the residents would decide its fate by referendum.

But as a General Assembly resolution it couldn't "designate" or determine anything, it could only suggest. The Israelis accepted the resolution, while all the Arab states denounced it, voted against it, and vowed to destroy Israel the moment the British left.

The Arabs were true to their words and invaded Israel the moment the Mandate ended and the British departed, but much to their surprise they lost the ensuing war. Their decision to ignore and violate the resolution rendered it moot, so there never was a UN designated "international zone" for Jerusalem.

Of course, had the Arab states and the Palestinians accepted the resolution and chosen to live in peace with Israel, there would be a Palestinian state about to celebrate its 70th year of existence, and there wouldn't have been a single Palestinian refugee. But the *Times* writers either don't know this or don't want their readers to know it.

And there's more wrong with the above excerpt – calling Jerusalem a "sacred site" for Israelis and Palestinians misleads much more than it explains, since the Temple Mount in Jerusalem is the holiest site for Jews, with no other site coming close. It is as holy to Jews as Mecca and Medina are to Muslims, and there is no similarly holy site in Jerusalem for Muslims.

The *Times* also writes that during the war in 1948 "Israel seized the city's western half [and then] seized the eastern half during the next Arab-Israeli war, in 1967."

Israel didn't seize the western half of Jerusalem, which was created and populated almost entirely by Jews, it defended it against Arab invaders, but lost the ancient Jewish quarter of the Old City and other parts of what is often termed east Jerusalem to the invading Jordanian forces.

Of course there is no mention by the *Times* that east Jerusalem was "seized" by Jordan. Again, the *Times* writers either don't know this or don't want their readers to know it.

As for Israel seizing the other half of Jerusalem in the "next" Arab-Israeli war in 1967, this is wrong and deceptive for two reasons. First, there was an Arab-Israeli war in 1956, and more importantly, when the 1967 war started, Israel repeatedly asked King Hussein and Jordan to stay out, promising not to attack Jordan if Jordan didn't attack Israel.

Indeed, as the King recounted in his autobiography, he responded to the peace offer by sending his British-supplied Hawker Hunter jets to bomb Israel:

... we received a telephone call at Air Force Headquarters from U.N. General Odd Bull.

It was a little after 11 A.M. The Norwegian General informed me that the Israeli Prime Minister had addressed an appeal to Jordan. Mr. Eshkol had summarily announced that the Israeli offensive had started that morning, Monday June 5, with operations directed against the United Arab Republic, and then he added: "If you don't intervene, you will suffer no consequences."

By that time we were already fighting in Jerusalem and our planes had just taken off to bomb Israeli airbases... (Hussein of Jordan: *My "War" with Israel*, by King Hussein)

After these aerial attacks Jordanian troops crossed the armistice lines and took Government House, the UN headquarters on a hill in the no-man's land between the two countries, directly threatening Israeli positions, and finally provoking a counterattack. Again, quoting King Hussein, "At 12:30 on that 5th of June came the first Israeli response to the combined bombing by the Jordanians, Iraqis and Syrians."

Why would the *Times* keep from its readers the fact that in both the battles for Jerusalem, in 1948 and 1967, it was the Arabs who attacked, and the Israelis who successfully defended?

Unfortunately the *Times* only compounded its errors in the rest of the article, claiming for example:

The United States, in order to present itself as a dispassionate broker, long considered Jerusalem's status to be a conflict issue that was up to Israelis and Palestinians to decide. Mr.Trump is breaking with that traditional neutrality.

Is this true? In fact, as President Trump said – and as reported by the *Times* – he is not recognizing any particular borders for Jerusalem, leaving that to the parties themselves to determine, as has long been US policy:

In making these announcements, I also want to make one point very clear. This decision is not intended in any way to reflect a departure from our strong commitment to facilitate a lasting peace agreement.

We want an agreement that is a great deal for the Israelis and a great deal for the Palestinians. We are not taking a position of any final status issues including the specific boundaries of the Israeli sovereignty in Jerusalem or the resolution of contested borders. Those questions are up to the parties involved.

The United States remains deeply committed to helping facilitate a peace agreement that is acceptable to both sides. I intend to do everything in my power to help forge such an agreement.

And the mistakes and deceptive omissions continued. The *Times*, for example, claimed that:

Evangelical Christians have been joined by a subset of American Jews and others on the political right in arguing that the United States should overtly back Israel in the conflict. This position hardened during the second intifada, a period of vicious Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the early 2000s.

It's true that many Evangelical Christians, and indeed, most Americans, support Israel. But calling the second intifada "a period of vicious Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the early 2000s," is kind of like calling Pearl Harbor a vicious battle between Japan and the United States, omitting the key context of how that battle came about.

In other words, the *Times* omits the main point, which was that after intensive negotiations quarterbacked by US President Bill Clinton, Israel accepted the so-called Clinton parameters, which gave the Palestinians everything they supposedly wanted, including a sovereign state with its capital in a divided Jerusalem, but Palestinian leader Yasir Arafat refused to take yes for an answer. Instead, he returned home and gave orders to start a second Palestinian uprising, or intifada.

That is, the second intifada didn't just happen in the passive voice, it was planned and executed by the Palestinians, as they rejected the best hope for peace since 1948.

It is also amazing that in an article about recognizing some part of Jerusalem as Israel's capital and moving the US embassy there, the *Times* omits any mention of the Jerusalem Embassy Act of 1995, passed by overwhelming majorities in the House and the Senate, and allowed into law by President Clinton (who didn't sign it or veto it in the requisite period).

That law, among other things, requires that:

(2) Jerusalem should be recognized as the capital of the State of Israel; and

(3) the United States Embassy in Israel should be established in Jerusalem no later than May 31, 1999.

Now, the law does allow the President to put off moving the embassy for six months at a time, which every president has done since passage of the law.

For the *Times* to omit any mention of this law in an article on the very subject of the law is nothing short of journalistic malpractice.

Finally, the *Times* claims that Trump's announcement will make it harder for the United States to act as an honest broker between the Palestinians and Israel, therefore making peace less likely.

But one can only assert such a view by ignoring all history since the 1940's:

1. In 1948 the Arabs and in particular the Palestinians turned down partition and the creation of a Palestinian state in favor of trying to destroy the Jewish state.
2. When that failed, and the Arabs controlled the West Bank and Gaza, they made no effort to create a Palestinian state, nor did Palestinians press for such a state.
3. At Camp David in 2000 and afterwards the Palestinians were again offered a state by President Bill Clinton. Despite the very painful concessions involved, the Israelis accepted the Clinton parameters but the

Palestinians rejected them. The Saudi Arabian representative at the talks urged Arafat to accept, and said it would be a crime against the Palestinian people to turn it down. Arafat's own negotiators thought they had a peace deal, until Arafat rejected their work.

4. In 2008 Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert went even further than the Clinton parameters, but Mahmoud Abbas, who by then had succeeded Arafat, turned down Olmert's offer without even making a counter offer.

(For further details and maps see [Palestinians Rejected Statehood Three Times, Claim Frustration – with Israel](#))

So for Fisher to claim that:

Much of the world already considered the United States a biased and unhelpful actor, promoting Israeli interests in a way that perpetuated the conflict

only exposes his own bias or ignorance. The main factor perpetuating the conflict is the Palestinian refusal to take yes for an answer, and to instead engage in violence and terrorism. Something which the *Times* comes shamefully close to endorsing when it approvingly and without criticism writes:

The Palestinian view is that Israel's occupation should be made costly and uncomfortable if it is to ever end.

But as detailed above, the Israelis tried to end it multiple times, except that the Palestinians keep saying no. And what does the *Times* think "uncomfortable" here means, besides more suicide bombings and murders?

By rewriting and ignoring history, Fisher and the *New York Times* are the ones helping to perpetuate the conflict.

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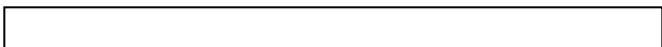
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Alex Safian, PhD

Alex Safian is the associate director of CAMERA. His articles have appeared in the Wall Street Journal, the

Boston Globe, the San Diego Union Tribune, the Jerusalem Post, NewsMax.com and National Review Online, Middle East Quarterly and other newspapers and academic journals..He has lectured widely on media coverage of the Middle East and related issues. Safian is the author of the monograph "PBS and Israel: A Pattern of Bias - The Case of Journey to the Occupied Lands" and testified before an appropriations subcommittee of the US Congress regarding bias in PBS and NPR programming.

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